Creative System Map

Your Current Creative System

You already organize your creativity. This worksheet assists you in making the current system visible and trackable over time.

Any improvement can only work if you know what is already there. So describe what you actually do, not a mental model of what you should do or could do. It should feel like mapping the terrain, not planning a new system. This keeps changes anchored in reality, as you modify something you have already mapped.

Accurate Assessment

When you read «*Organizing Creativity*», follow the prompts at the end of each chapter to map your creative system. Write down **what you currently do** regarding that element (e.g., person, capturing ideas, evaluating projects). In some cases that will be a mess — and then that is the right thing to externalize. The goal is accuracy, not performance.

Do not evaluate whether that element works well or not. First look at the whole system, then evaluate the individual elements in context. Something that might seem only obnoxious might not be that relevant compared to a major stumbling block. Worse, you might be working on imagined problems or change things that might seem ineffective locally but work overall.

If you have ideas of what to change, park them on this page, but map the full system before you conduct any trials. Otherwise even obvious changes likely remain ineffective for deliberately creating things that are new and useful.

Assessment Sheet

The sheet on the next page follows the structure of the book, with an additional box to specify the domain and field constraints on your work.

Diagnosing Flow Problems

Pages 3 to 7 contain the flow tables from the book. They can assist you in identifying possible problems.

Note that the goal is not to create the perfect system, but to increase the quality and quality of deliberately created works that are new and useful.

Intervention Design

After mapping and diagnosing your system, **select one element that limits your creative output the most**. That can be an underflow (e.g., ideas are not captured) or an overflow (e.g., too many interests prevent focus and progress). Change only what demonstrably interferes with your work.

Use the □ Integration Worksheet and — if available — the □ Worksheets listed in the book chapter to test a small change. This will show you whether the change produces observable effects and integrates into your life.

Keep the Creative System Map to see how your creative system changes over time. That will also show you if you oscillate between solutions.

Parked Change Ideas (Do Not Act Yet)

Creative System Map

Date: _____

Generating Ideas

Flow:

Creative Focus

Direction:

Energy:

Core:

Central:

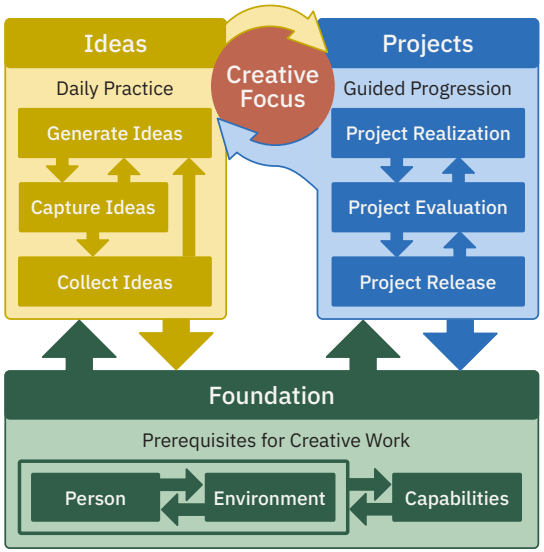
Flow:

Realizing Projects

Flow:

Capturing Ideas

Flow:



Evaluating Projects

Flow:

Collecting Ideas

Flow:

Releasing Projects

Flow:

Constraints

Domain

Field

Person

Flow:

Environment

Flow:

Capabilities

Flow:

Most Relevant Flow Issues

Creative System Map: Foundation (1/2)

Person

Aspect	Underflow	Optimal Flow	Overflow
Meaning	pointlessness, purely transactional work, no durable reason to continue	a strong why, connected to something significant enough to sustain effort	ideological possession, fanaticism, brittle overinvestment
Curiosity	little exploration, low questioning, narrow search space	active exploration, openness to surprise, directed variation	interest in everything, diffusion, endless exploration without realization
Regulation and Play	overwhelmed by emotion, fear narrows the mind, no relief or recovery	emotional steadiness, ability to shift stance, humor and play support the work	emotional volatility, suppression, or fun displacing the work
Domain Knowledge and Skill	missing fundamentals, weak fit to domain demands, too many compensations needed	sufficient knowledge and skill to work meaningfully and keep improving	endless learning without application, near-perfect fit triggering reactance
Competence	ideas fail in execution, large gaps between intention and realization	ideas can be realized under real constraints; skill becomes available when needed	perfectionism, fear of error, expertise narrowing vision
Judgment	blindness to feedback, weak criticism, poor perspective-taking, ad hoc decisions	alert, reality-based, open to correction, able to decide proportionately	overanalysis, skepticism about everything, paralysis, trying to satisfy every perspective
Discipline	only working when inspired, irregular effort, weak continuation	regular work with breaks and recovery, enough consistency for real progress	rigidity, compulsive-ness, obsession

Aspect	Underflow	Optimal Flow	Overflow
Own Agenda	easily swayed, no stable direction, weak commitment	deliberate choice of direction, clear priorities, honest acceptance of costs	ruthlessness, disregard for others, scorched-earth behavior
Ambiguity Tolerance and Courage	hesitation, avoidance, fear of failure or exposure, premature retreat from uncertainty	willingness to act despite uncertainty, stress, and possible pushback	recklessness, thrill-seeking, mistaking conflict for value
Opportunity Exposure	invisibility, avoiding exposure, never becoming findable	being present where opportunities can arise, visible enough to be found and selected	overexposure, pushiness, exhausting others, moving too fast to build trust
Self-Regulation and Persistence	distraction, instability, premature abandonment, weak coping	sustained effort, stress handled without collapse, persistence with flexibility	ossification, deafness to feedback, life organized around one project to a destructive degree
Quitting Well	continuing dead projects too long, sunk-cost capture	clear kill criteria, willingness to stop when success is no longer plausible	quitting when work becomes tedious, difficult, or temporarily unrewarding

Environment

Aspect	Underflow	Optimal Flow	Overflow
Physical Location and Infrastructure	wrong place, weak setup, high start-up costs, poor ergonomics	place and setup make starting and continuing work easy	pristine or overengineered setup becomes more important than using it
Physical Stimulation	environment is dead, uninspiring, or missing cues for work	stimulation is aligned with the work and low in irrelevant noise	clutter, visual noise, and competing affordances fragment attention
Digital Infrastructure	default tools or settings limit work, files are scattered, backups neglected	selected, stable, low-overhead digital setup with reliable backups	endless customization, maintenance overhead, unstable routines
Digital Stimulation	too little useful input or contact, unnecessary isolation	bounded input, strong protection of deep-work and idle phases	notifications, doomscrolling, constant checking, broken attention
Social Infrastructure and Collaboration	isolation, weak support, missing mentors, poor collaboration	supportive, challenging, complementary relationships and teams	too many interactions, meetings, obligations, or social costs
Influence, Leadership	work is ignored or discounted	fair evaluation, useful leadership, enough influence	politics, status insulation, or deference distort judgment
Field Contact	work reaches the field too late	reality-based feedback	crowd-pleasing distorts judgment
Cultural Relationship to Creativity	creativity is neglected, distrusted, or given no real room	open inquiry, challengeable assumptions, merit-based evaluation, room for good work	ideology, conformity pressure, taboo questions, and distorted standards
Subcultures and Zeitgeist	no pockets of excellence, little contact with live currents	selective contact with the zeitgeist and access to fruitful subcultures	hype capture, outrage cycles, splintering, or interchange-able work driven by trend-following

Creative System Map: Foundation (2/2)

Capabilities

Aspect	Underflow	Optimal Flow	Overflow
Physical and Mental Health	low energy, poor sleep, deteriorating focus, fragile mood, reduced capacity	health is sufficiently protected to sustain work over time	overcontrol, health obsession, self-monitoring replaces work
Focused Work and Follow-Through	shallow effort, weak concentration, procrastination, little real progress	regular deep work, clear start points, sustained progress	overwork, all-nighters, grinding past recovery, effort detached from priorities
Defended Time, Recovery, and Fallow Time	too little defended time, no real breaks, no idle cycles	enough protected time for work, enough recovery and fallow time for insight	overplanned days, no spontaneity, no recuperation, every gap filled
Learning and Skill Acquisition	weak fundamentals, reluctance to learn, capabilities lag behind aims	deliberate learning aligned with current creative demands	endless learning, collecting knowledge without application, capability building becomes avoidance
Communi-cation and Collaboration	poor externalization, weak feedback loops, inability to work with others	clear communi-cation, useful feedback, productive cooperation when needed	communication displaces making, social process replaces creative output

Tools

Aspect	Underflow	Optimal Flow	Overflow
Tool Fit	mismatch the work, make capture or realization awkward, or remain unavailable when needed	tools fit the task and the person well enough to support reliable output	tool-chasing, prestige buying, or identity attachment replaces actual creating
Affordances and Demands	tools are too weak, too crude, or too poorly understood to support the work	affordances match the work, and demands stay within manageable skill and maintenance costs	tools overcomplicate the work, demand too much upkeep, or pull attention into their own logic
Adaptation and Control	tools are left in friction-heavy default states	tools are adjusted enough to reduce unnecessary friction and support flow	endless customization, tinkering, and setup work displace actual creation
Dependency Risk	no attunement to any tools; workflows remain clumsy and replaceable, but inefficient	familiarity improves speed and quality without creating lock-in	workflow becomes fragile through dependence on specific tools, subscriptions, platforms, or file formats
AI Use	refusal to use AI even where it would clearly help with feedback, iteration, or knowledge access	selective use of AI to extend capability while keeping the creator close to the work	overreliance, deskilling, or drift into managerial distance from the making itself

Creative System Map: Ideas

Generating Ideas

Aspect	Underflow	Optimal Flow	Overflow
Knowledge for Ideas	lack of domain knowledge and embodied skill leads to ideas that seem coherent but do not work	sufficient knowledge to understand the requirements and constraints, without being discouraged by them	expert status leads to seeing what cannot be done instead of finding out how it might be done
Unassigned Attention	attention is constantly pre-allocated, so there is no incubation and no time for more structured approaches	establishing periods without external distractions, and using creativity methods to work deliberately on project ideas	blocking too much time for ideation at the cost of craftsmanship
Protection from Overcontrol	no idle cycles, insufficient understanding of the problem, seeing it as miraculous and not creating the conditions for it	making idle cycles a normal part of the day and not expecting anything from them	trying to force ideation, especially inspiration and insight, and thereby preventing it
Ideation Types	using the wrong type for the project stage and generating unusable or confusing ideas (e.g., drift when the project needs to be finalized)	switching to the required type of ideation depending on what is needed (e.g., from finding a new project idea to solving a bug)	still generating types of ideas that are no longer needed
Creative Engines, Modes, and Methods	using them in an ad hoc manner	determining which engines, modes, and methods fit the stage of the project, the individual, and the domain or field	overfocusing on particular engines, modes, or methods; continuing to generate when the project needs to be finalized
Common Failure Modes of Ideation	wrong problem: pedestals before monkey problems; insufficient evaluation; ignoring domain and field affordances	solving the monkey problems first	premature convergence on a suboptimal idea; clinging to an idea because it seems precious

Capturing Ideas

Aspect	Underflow	Optimal Flow	Overflow
Fast, Easy, Available, and Usable Later	leakage due to high latency or effort, method unavailable, undecipherable notes	available without thinking, capture is a normal part of the day	capturing too much noise or «*everything*»
Preserving the Essence	preserving only the what, but not the how or why; ideas become dead, abstract, cold	capturing the information needed to preserve the essence for future projects	going beyond capture and developing the idea prematurely (e.g., writing scenes instead of preserving it)
Connection to Idea Collection	transfer from capture to collection stalls, e.g., due to media breaks, effortful reading, or aversive listening	transfer is part of the normal workflow with a defined collection point (e.g., Collection Inbox)	captured ideas enter the collection without elaboration or quality control
Capturing Tools	tools not available or not suited to the context (e.g., ideas while driving but only a notepad in the car instead of voice recording)	infrastructure provides default tools with a fallback option	too many options create decisions and interfere with capture
Common Failure Modes of Capturing Ideas	no way to capture, not capturing due to social concerns	using what is available, focusing on capture, not overreacting to missed ideas, balanced capture	ruminating about missed ideas, trying to capture everything

Collecting Ideas

Aspect	Underflow	Optimal Flow	Overflow
Handling Ideas, Projects and Connections	collection not suited for ideas, projects, or making connections	collection is content-agnostic and links can be created easily	high overhead, e.g., pages need too much metadata or links are hard to create
Collection Type	ignoring structural effects on the collection, leading to accidental growth	let structure emerge first, then shape the collection to support growth	forcing content into an unsuitable structure
Growth, Change, and Retrieval	growth too difficult (e.g., space limited, changes cumbersome)	collection supports the functions well, tool fades into the background, focus stays on realization	collecting takes too much attention away from realizing the work
Long-Term Availability	trusting solutions too much and losing data or access later	check exportability and long-term viability, then using tool fully	being too skeptical and denying oneself good tools
Collection Inbox	no inbox buffer, causing friction through constant small entries without synergy effects	using an Idea Inbox regularly, avoiding both huge backlogs and constant re-entry	inbox becomes an idea drawer, backlog, or unstructured dump
Handling Additional Information	keeping the collection too pure and denying useful synergy effects	connecting ideas to other relevant material where helpful	storing everything in the collection, producing too many unrelated hits
Tools for Collections and Starting	defaulting to a tool without exploring options	making an informed decision and then prioritizing momentum and growth	extensively planning a collection instead of letting it develop
Common Failure Modes	letting the collection grow uncontrolled until it becomes dead weight	clear function: accumulate ideas and support realization of large projects	wasting time on the collection instead of the work; entering, not using; swamp collection; using it for everything

Creative System Map: Creative Focus

Creative Direction

Aspect	Underflow	Optimal Flow	Overflow
Aspiration	no clear direction, blundering around, little directed progress	clear, desired, and possible aspiration, clear primary direction, others are supporting, represented, preserved, or relinquished	premature narrowing, locked into a specific career path or goal, high risk if that goal is not reached or not as good as expected
Waypoints	next project is chosen by mood or by what seems easiest	deliberate selection of the next waypoint based on aspiration and current position	rumination and analysis paralysis, inability to abandon waypoints that no longer make sense
Practice	no consistency, starting and abandoning work frequently	practice aligned with aspiration and waypoints, with time for other activities	overscheduled, too much focus on creative work, life becomes brittle
Creative Finitude and Limits	limits are not set; too many possible lives remain eligible; decisions are repeatedly reopened	finite life is acknowledged; directions are lived, represented, preserved, or relinquished	premature narrowing; excessive pruning; valuable directions are excluded before they are understood

Creative Energy

Aspect	Underflow	Optimal Flow	Overflow
Core Projects	not deciding on one; starting and quitting quickly when work becomes hard or tedious; no force behind projects	clear focus on one core project that always comes first	starting many projects and trying to pursue them equally despite energy spreading thin
Central Projects	having none or too few; risk of falling into a hole when the core project is done	keeping a handful of central projects growing without implementing them	having too many; trying to implement them so they compete with the core project
Peripheral Projects	having none, so no growth while working on other projects	large collection with deliberate movement into central projects when warranted	making them too salient so they act like central projects and drain attention
Side Projects	doing none, resulting in long phases without finishing anything	occasional side projects for exploration and quick wins	side projects gain too much mass and displace the core project

Creative Commitment

Aspect	Underflow	Optimal Flow	Overflow
Constraints	not set, daily life crowds out project work	blocking sufficient time and energy for the project	constraints so tight that they strangle flexibility
Scope	unclear, feature creep, no standards preventing quality decline, no release criteria leading to endless «*optimization*», no kill criteria leading to zombie projects	minimum viable project with distinctive value, challenging standards, clear release and kill criteria	too strictly defined, preventing the project from growing and improving during realization; standards so high that release is blocked
Standards, Release and Kill Criteria	not defined, quality usually negotiated downward, high risk of postponed release or zombie projects	clear and high standards, release and kill criteria, but no perfectionism, accountability partner if needed	over-detailed standards, release and kill criteria, not based on real constraints but on a perfect world
Rubicon Criteria	insufficiently checked, leading e.g. to lack of value, undiscovered monkey problems, etc.	checked, but if criteria are unclear or not fulfilled, that is recognized and chosen deliberately	endless analysis and rumination, especially when more than one project could work; avoiding decision; being discouraged when some planning fallacy might actually be useful
Common Failure Modes	hard problems not solved, idea not new, idea not useful, abandonment or project-hopping	making an informed decision and then enjoying the project work	too many projects, hesitating to start

Creative System Map: Projects

Project Realization

Aspect	Underflow	Optimal Flow	Overflow
Realization Approaches	treating every project as a one-shot, learning too late that assumptions were wrong	choosing one-shot or iterative realization to fit the project, target audience, reversibility, and risk	endless iteration, perpetual prototyping, no convergence toward release
Project Constraints	under-defined project, vague goals, difficult to focus on	minimal viable project with distinctive value, used as a standard when changes are made	over-defined project, no flexibility for improvement during realization
Long-Term Focused Implementation	progress too slow, work stalls, demotivation	one core project, other projects only in ideation/structure, side projects if needed, breaks and break days	doing the project to the exclusion of everything else, becoming aversive quickly
Craftsmanship	shoddy work, rushing just to finish	clear standards, excellent work, feedback from work and target group	perfectionism paralyzes the work
Pragmatic Planning	insufficient planning makes course correction and progress checks impossible	milestones and deadlines, right scope and level of detail, regular preparation of the workplace	planning with tasks, milestones, and time estimates so detailed that it no longer fits unpredictable creative work
Regular Evidence-based Reviews	no review means drift goes unnoticed	generating hard evidence through work itself, regular check-ins, adjustment	tracking and reviewing replace the work itself
Common Failure Modes of Realization	Blocks, Zombie Projects, Lack of Energy, Mistakes, Someone Beat You to It	enjoying the work, knowing you have done your best to ensure progress	Fear and Self-Doubt, Over-Commitment bypassing Kill/Release Criteria

Project Evaluation

Aspect	Underflow	Optimal Flow	Overflow
Willingness to Improve	seeing success and failure as judgment on the person	evaluation results show what is needed to grow and improve	staying in a creative endeavor with little chance of improvement
Resistance Criteria	vague criteria, no clear indication of progress or what to change	clear criteria and standards that guide iterations	overly specific criteria that do not fit the work
Repeated Reality Contact	avoiding reality contact to «*protect*» ideas or the project, drifting away from usefulness over time	evaluations before, during, and after realization, so the project develops in the right direction	evaluation so frequent that solutions do not stabilize and growth phases disappear
Valid Feedback	no or low-quality criteria, lots of noise, weak decision support	useful, directionally correct feedback, with awareness of its limits	discounting feedback due to too high truth standard
Understanding a Situation	stereotypes, unchecked assumptions, overconfidence	realistic understanding; looking at what is happening	getting lost in analysis, refusal to generalize at all
Value of a Solution	assuming value, confusing «*nice*» with «*valuable*»	clear criteria for what the work should achieve, cleanly evaluated	perfectionism, not allowing the artifact to stand on its own
Feedback from a Single Source	using whoever is convenient rather than useful, following counsel uncritically	deliberately choosing a source that can give actionable feedback	discounting well-argued input, impossible standards, too much weight
Dealing with Feedback	using only convenient feedback	openness to feedback and deliberate decisions	conflicting feedback without integration or prioritization
Common Failure Modes of Evaluation	Self-Deception, Using Feedback for Other Purposes, ignoring feedback	using evaluation as decision support for improving the work	Analysis Paralysis, Tainted Identity, Not Achieving Standards

Project Release

Aspect	Underflow	Optimal Flow	Overflow
Willingness to Let Go	not releasing artifacts, trying to keep them under direct control	seeing release as the final step in finding out whether the work actually functions, and respecting that step	releasing unfinished artifacts, bad work, «*noise*»
Release Criteria	vague, insufficiently specified, never triggered, clogged system	clearly defined when crossing the Rubicon and adhered to in practice	too high, too complex, never triggered, clogged system
Audience Compatibility	tone-deaf, not aligned with the expectations of domain and/or field	adapting the release and/or the work so the target audience can understand and accept it without compromising the work	focusing more on communication style than on actual value
Archiving Released Work	fire-and-forget, not learning from past projects	keeping an archive that informs and improves future work	being too strongly influenced by past projects
Last Steps Mistakes	low standards once the actual work is done, e.g., sloppy administrative work	keeping focus until the work is actually released, taking breaks if necessary	overthinking every step, where concern about mistakes becomes the mistake
(Fear of) Public Criticism or Pushback	walking blindly into explosive or third-rail issues, letting others control the narrative	knowing the issue and likely reactions, differentiating between honest and dishonest actors, getting support if needed	avoiding important but loaded themes or issues out of fear of pushback
Confusing Release with Marketing or Sales	not making sure the target audience can find the work, therefore little or no impact	pointing out the work factually, without arrogance or false humility	over-promoting the work in a tone-deaf way, spamming, sounding like a «*broken record*»